First Time Flying – What Do I Need To Know?

Arriving At the Airport

Airports, especially large ones, seem very confusing for first-time visitors. Once you learn the routines you will find them quite comfortable. Remember your most important goals: check in, enter the security area and board the plane.

Arrive in good time at the airport

Everything takes time at the airport: check-in, getting through security, and walking to your departure gate which could be quite a distance away. Your airline can tell you when to arrive at the airport (usually 1 hour before the plane leaves). As a first time traveler, you should give yourself an extra half hour above the time they recommend. Incidents, like not finding your terminal or looking for the right check-in counter, can steal your time. The times given by the airline are good for frequent travelers, but first time travelers might need some more time.

Arrive at the right terminal

Larger airports have many terminals and quite often, the distances between the terminals are long. It is important to arrive at the right terminal. Your travel itinerary often says from what terminal your plane is departing. If you are unsure, contact the airport, your travel agency or your airline.

Have your travel documents available

You need your travel documents frequently at the airport. Important travel documents might be: passport, driver’s license or other identification, boarding pass (given to you at the check-in) and your travel itinerary (not important but very handy).

Check-in

When you arrive in the departure area, find the check-in counter for your airline. If the check-in for your route has not started yet, find out when it is starting, find a seat nearby and relax until it is time to check in. The check-in serves two main purposes: deliver your checked baggage to the airline and get a boarding pass for your flight.

Please see the section at the end of this document regarding Baggage – both checked and carry-on.

Going Through Security

After checking in, all passengers must go through a Security check point. The general process is:

- Hand your passport, driver’s license or other ID and your boarding pass to the security officer. They will do a quick review of the documents and hand all of it back to you.
- Proceed to the security screening line
- Take a plastic bin(s) and put your shoes, coat, laptop, purse, cell phone and clear bag of clear plastic bag of liquids (described in the carry-on baggage section of this document) in it.
- Empty the contents of your pockets into the plastic bin or the small plastic container provided for loose change, etc.
- If you are wearing a belt or heavy metal jewelry you may be asked to remove those as well.
- If you have a carry-on bag, place it on the belt for screening.
- Once your items have entered the screening machine, walk through the personal security equipment.
Reclaim your items on the other end of the security line, making sure that you do not leave anything behind.

NOTE: Random screenings do occur when a person’s items are moved to the side and opened for inspection. If you are selected for this, it is merely random and it will be done with you present.

**Boarding**

During boarding, all the passengers are guided to the plane. If the flight has reserved seats, boarding might be done in several phases. Listen carefully to the boarding instructions. Most boarding starts approximately 20-30 minutes prior to take-off.

You have to present your boarding pass and sometimes your passport or identification during boarding. Some airports also have an additional security control during boarding.

When you enter the plane, find your seat. Put your carry-on baggage in an empty overhead compartment or under the seat in front of you. If you have a seat next to the emergency exit, you will not be able to put your baggage under the seat. In such cases, you will have to put the baggage in the overhead. Try to be seated as fast as possible. Fasten your seatbelt and wait for the take-off.

**In the air**

The flight is usually the most exciting part of the journey for first-time flyers. During take-off and landing, you must turn off any electronic devices. This includes cell phones, computers, iPads, MP3 players, and games.

- Do not be surprised by a pressure or slight pain in your ears during takeoff or landing. This is due to changing air pressure and can be relieved by chewing gum or pinching your nose closed while trying to blow air through your nose.
- Turbulence, or bouncing, is a normal experience on a plane. It is not dangerous. Look at your fellow passengers and look at the crew. Most likely, nobody is concerned. Keep your seatbelt fastened at all times. This is for your safety in case unexpected turbulence occurs.

**Transfers/Connections**

Sometimes you have to change plane before you reach your final destination. Transferring from one plane to another might require changing terminals.

**Prepare for a long walk between terminals**

Some bigger airports have long distances between the terminals. Prepare yourself for a long walk if you are changing terminals. Some airports have underground or overhead trains to move you between terminals. Follow the signs that appear in all the main walkways to get to the appropriate terminal.

**Arriving at your flight destination**

The arriving process is quite simple. Remember to check that you have all of your carry-on baggage with you before leaving the plane.

If you are at your final destination, follow the signs to the Baggage Claim and reclaim your baggage. It can take some time for the baggage to arrive but you will see others from your flight waiting as well.
What to do if the baggage is missing

If your baggage has not arrived, (it happens occasionally) go to the baggage claim office and report your baggage missing. You will have to provide the baggage receipt that you have got from the check-in and you have to describe your bag (color, size, type, etc.). Most missing baggage is coming with a later plane. Make a transport agreement with the arrival service to get the baggage transported to your address at the destination. Leave your phone number and request a phone number where you can contact them if necessary.

What to do if your baggage is damaged

If your baggage has been damaged during the flight, go directly to the baggage claim office and report the damage. If you have a camera, take pictures of the damage (insurance companies love pictures). Always check for damages before leaving the baggage claim area.

Packing Your Bag

Checked baggage is checked in and handed off to the airline before you enter the security zone at the airport. Due to security reasons there are some limitations on baggage:

- Your baggage can not contain any dangerous goods like compressed gases, corrosives, explosives (includes firework), flammable liquids and solids, radioactive materials, oxidizing materials, poisons, infectious substances, and briefcases with installed alarm devices
- The weight of your baggage must not exceed the weight limits given by the airline
- The size of your baggage must not exceed the size limits given by the airline
- Electronic devices in baggage must be turned off.
- It is not recommended that you pack valuable items like cash, jewelry, traveler’s checks or laptop computers in your checked baggage.
- Undeveloped films and cameras should be putted in carry-on baggage since screeners can destroy these if packed in checked baggage.
- Cigarette lighters are not allowed in carry-on baggage in U.S.
- Lock your checked baggage.

Carry-on baggage is the baggage that you bring into the security area and on to the plane yourself. For security reasons, there are restrictions on what you can pack into your carry-on baggage:

- Carry-on baggage must meet the size limitations of the airline, able to fit in the overhead compartment on the plane or under the seat.
- Any liquids must be consolidated into one clear plastic bag, and each item cannot be over 3 oz. in weight. You will be asked to take these out during the Security screening process.
- Your carry-on baggage can not contain any sharp objects (knives, scissors, and razors).
- Your carry-on baggage cannot contain cigarette lighters.